

COMMISSION ACTION

NCPC File No. 1303/6152



WASHINGTON MONUMENT GROUNDS FINAL SITE DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR VISITOR AND SECURITY IMPROVEMENTS - LANDSCAPE PLAN

Between 14th and 17th Streets, NW and Constitution Avenue, NW and the Tidal Basin
Washington, DC

Submission by the National Park Service
June 5, 2003

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of final site development plans for the landscape plan pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1)).

Commission Action

The Commission:

- **Approves** the final site development plans for the landscape plan at the Washington Monument Grounds, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.42(38.00) 41180, provided the Monument Plaza be paved entirely in granite, rather than in granite and exposed aggregate concrete.
- **Requires** that NPS's future submission of the preliminary and final site and building plans for the below-grade visitors facility and concourse include construction and site details of all hatches and mechanical vents that will appear above grade on the monument grounds.

Deborah B. Young
Secretary to the National Capital Planning Commission

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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WASHINGTON MONUMENT GROUNDS FINAL SITE DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR VISITOR AND SECURITY IMPROVEMENTS - LANDSCAPE PLAN

Between 14th and 17th Streets, NW and Constitution Avenue, NW and the Tidal Basin
Washington, DC

Submission by the National Park Service
May 29, 2003

Abstract

The National Park Service (NPS) requests approval of the Final Site Development Plans for the landscape plan associated with the proposed comprehensive visitor and security improvements at the Washington Monument Grounds. The Commission approved, at its January 9, 2003 meeting, the preliminary plans for the landscape, which included the retaining walls and paths, the tree planting and grading plans, and improvements to the monument plaza. The current submission includes construction details for these elements, as well as for related features such as the plaza benches, the lodge bench, lighting fixtures throughout the site, bollards, and directional signs. The submission also includes a draft Cultural Landscape Report.

The Commission gave preliminary approval to NPS for the landscape plan (January 2003) and for the lodge addition and skylight (April 2003). The Commission gave concept approval (February and April 2002) for the below-grade visitors facility and concourse to the monument. NCPC signed the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) in December 2002 and continues to participate in consultation under the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act and the terms of the Programmatic Agreement.

Commission Action Requested by the Applicant

Approval of final site development plans for the landscape plan pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1)).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the final site development plans for the landscape plan at the Washington Monument Grounds, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.42(38.00) 41180, provided the Monument Plaza be paved entirely in granite, rather than in granite and exposed aggregate concrete.

Requires that NPS's future submission of the preliminary and final site and building plans for the below-grade visitors facility and concourse include construction and site details of all hatches and mechanical vents that will appear above grade on the monument grounds.

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

NPS has submitted final site development plans for the Washington Monument Grounds. The elements of the landscape plan submission include:

General Site Layout and Grading

The character of the topography of the grounds will be preserved, including the prominence of the knoll, the swale at the lodge, the deeper swale at the Sylvan Theater, and the broad slopes of the greensward to the west and north. The Washington Monument Grounds will be subtly re-graded either to improve existing conditions or to accommodate the retaining walls and paths and provide accessibility for all visitors.

Retaining Walls (Vehicular Barriers) and Paths

The retaining walls, which form an ellipse at the base of the knoll, serve as vehicle barriers for the monument. The walls have been designed for seating, as well. Thirty inches in height, the walls are faced with two courses of dark gray (Ash Rose) granite veneer with a rock-pitch finish, topped with a honed, solid granite cap. Mesabi Black granite will be used for the curb.

A new system of curvilinear paths will be associated with the retaining walls at the base of the knoll and will form elliptical arcs up the knoll to the perimeter of the monument plaza at its north and south points. The 12-foot-wide paths meet the design and material standards of the Mall Road manual and also meet accessibility standards, at just under a five per cent slope.

At the four points where the paths leading from the corners of the grounds join the retaining walls, pairs of bollards will be installed in the paths between the seating walls and a free-

standing stone wall. The bollards are semi-automatic and hydraulic. They will be fabricated of stainless steel with a low contrast finish.

The placement of the existing paths entering the grounds from the corners of the site will be adjusted and some new paths will be constructed. The paths will be paved in dark gray exposed aggregate concrete to be consistent with the Mall Roads manual. The two east-west paths between the monument plaza and 17th Street will be retained. Paved paths installed by NPS in an *ad hoc* manner in recent decades will be removed.

The retaining wall around the west side of the lodge addition—the subject of a Commission recommendation for a lower, 18-inch seating wall at its May 1, 2003 meeting—is shown on the plans at its full 30-inch height.

A curved, granite seating bench will be placed in front of and facing the lodge's 15th Street entrance. The form of the bench echoes the curved retaining wall encircling the monument lodge addition. The bench seat will be 16 inches in height and the bench back will be 36 inches in height. The area will be graded so that the bench is incorporated in an earthen berm. The bench will not be attached to the retaining wall near the lodge.

The Monument Plaza

The size of the plaza will be retained but the concrete and asphalt surface will be replaced with the two colors of granite proposed for the retaining walls in concentric circles. As an alternative, NPS proposes substituting the gray-colored exposed aggregate concrete (to be used for the paths) for the largest concentric ring.

The fifty flagpoles will continue to encircle the plaza.

Eight curved, backless benches of white granite will be installed at the outer edge of the plaza.

Planting Plan

Trees are clustered in groves around the perimeter of the grounds, particularly on the southern edge near Independence Avenue and the Sylvan Theater. The site has a pronounced slope at this edge, although it is relatively flat around the other sides. The vistas along the Mall axes are open, particularly on the west. Narrower openings among the trees are present on the north and south axis, and on the north side of the lodge.

The proposed planting plan will retain the open space devoted to events and recreation, including the eight ball fields, while adding a significant number of both shade and flowering trees to augment and extend the groves at the perimeter of the grounds. Flowering trees will be planted on the uphill side of all the groves of shade trees in order to extend smaller and lower trees into the site. The new trees will be planted far enough apart so that the turf itself survives and the pronounced grassy character of the grounds is preserved.

The planting plan preserves and enhances the north-south and east-west axial views to and through the site. Looking west, for example, from the central panel of the Mall the lodge is not visible because it is sited within a pronounced swale, and because there is a berm at 15th Street. NPS's design purpose is to open the axial view from the east by planting trees that will attain a lower height relative to the lodge, and also to create a distinct physical sub-landscape character for the lodge as it resumes its importance on the grounds.

Approximately 800 shade and flowering trees will be planted on the grounds, augmenting the approximately 400 trees on the grounds that are proposed for retention, for a total of approximately 1200 trees on the grounds. American Elms will be planted as street trees. Shade trees will include the Yellowwood, Tulip Tree, Sycamore, White Oak, Bald Cypress, and American Linden, among others. Flowering trees will include the Redbud, Higan and Yoshino Cherry, and the Star Magnolia.

NPS proposes to remove or relocate 72 trees. Some are unhealthy and others will be removed to accommodate regrading and the construction of the paths.

Lighting

The monument and the grounds will have a new lighting plan that will improve the quality of the light and the lighting effects on the monument and grounds, modernize the equipment and make it more efficient, remove lighting fixtures near the monument, and illuminate the new walking paths so that visitors can visit the monument easily after nightfall.

NPS proposes five types of lights to illuminate the grounds, three of which will illuminate the monument itself:

- In-grade recessed uplights in the plaza will illuminate the base of the monument.
- High intensity floodlights mounted within recessed vaults will wash the monument shaft with light.
- High intensity, narrow-beam spotlights will illuminate the monument peak. The new spotlights will be installed on the existing lighting stands at the four corners of the grounds.

Two additional types of lighting will be added to the grounds to address the proposed new conditions:

- Low-profile, low-wattage L.E.D. niche lights in the retaining walls will wash the paths with low light.
- In-grade, recessed uplights will be installed along the front façade of the lodge to light its facade.

Signs

The Commission approved a comprehensive directional signage plan submitted by the D.C. Department of Public Works on behalf of the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) in August 1999. The Commission understood at the time that NPS would install the approved signs, perhaps with some modification, at decision points on the Mall to improve visitor orientation. NPS has continued to work with the Downtown BID in the development of the signs installed at downtown NPS sites such as Ford's Theatre.

The proposed Washington Monument signs will have the familiar blue-enameled sign faces and be mounted on black posts. NPS has simplified both the signposts and the graphic content of the signs, but the signs will be recognizable to visitors as part of the family of signs in use elsewhere in the city.

A total of 22 signs are proposed for the grounds. Of these, 14 are similar to the BID signs and the other 8 are designed to be integral with the landscape architecture:

- Eleven orientation signs will be installed around the perimeter of the grounds where paths lead onto the grounds. These signs will have a graphic plan of the grounds and its principal features and will be oriented in the viewer's direction. The signs are low (four feet high at the top) and angled so they may be easily viewed by all.
- Three regulatory signs will be installed near the lodge. The sign faces, approximately two feet in height on three-foot posts, will indicate ticket policy and other visitor information.
- Six signs on the retaining wall capstones will direct visitors to the lodge. Three inches in height, the incised (and likely stained) words indicate "Washington Monument Visitors Entrance" with an incised arrow.
- Two lawn plaques at the intersections of the paths north and south of the monument will direct visitors "To Ticketing" with an incised arrow. The granite plaques are 17 inches in diameter and slanted low to the ground.

Mechanical elements on the grounds

As part of the final landscape plan, NPS has submitted a proposed irrigation system of pop-up spray heads to be installed across the center of the grounds on the east-west axis.

Staff anticipates that new mechanical elements will be installed on the grounds in relation to the below-grade visitors facility and concourse. The new elements are *not* included in the current landscape submission and will be submitted when the below-grade elements of the proposed project are submitted for review by the Commission later this year.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

The Commission gave preliminary approval to NPS for the landscape plan (January 2003) and for the lodge addition and skylight (April 2003). The Commission gave concept approval (February and April 2002) for the below-grade visitors facility and concourse to the monument. The revised Development Concept Plan was approved in January 2003. In 1994 the Commission approved, as part of the Development Concept Plan, the concept of an underground Visitors Center. NPS anticipates submitting the remaining elements of the proposed project—the preliminary and final site and building plans for the visitors facility and the concourse, and the final site and building plans for the lodge rehabilitation and the lodge addition—in Fall 2003.

EVALUATION

The proposed landscape plan will create a new appearance for the grounds and reflects new requirements for the site. At the same time, the plan reflects both the past history of partially implemented plans and the continuity of the character and use of the grounds over time. The proposed design retains the paradoxical pastoral quality for which the Mall cross-axis point is noted, while complementing the larger axial formality that has defined the Mall since the last century.

The plan alters the circulation plan of the grounds in response to necessary or desirable changes in the use of the site, as have the numerous previous circulation plans for the grounds. (Automobiles could drive up to the monument plaza until 1960, for example.)

The plan preserves the use of the site for active and passive public recreation, and for public gathering. The plan integrates the stipulated security requirements in as minimally intrusive a way as possible and preserves the site as open space for the enjoyment of visitors to the grounds who do not wish to enter the monument.

Grading

The consistent purpose of the proposed grading plan since the Commission first reviewed the project in 2002 has been to preserve the pronounced slope of the knoll from which the monument rises while smoothing the small surface variations to allow for the even rise of the retaining walls and paths as they ascend the slope to the monument plaza. A comparison of the existing and proposed cross-site grading slopes indicates some increased uniformity in the knoll, although the pastoral and variegated character of the slope across the grounds is retained. The grading adjustments on the knoll, proposed to accommodate the intersection of the paths and retaining walls and to allow for full accessibility for all visitors, have been reviewed by the Commission at its February 2002 and January 2003 meetings.

Retaining Walls and Paths

The addition of vehicle barriers is a requirement of the project that has been achieved by placing the retaining wall at the base of the knoll so that it becomes part of the character of the landscape to the greatest extent possible. Alternative locations for the barrier line, either partway up the slope of the knoll or at the perimeter of the site, for example, would be significantly more visible and unacceptably intrusive in the landscape.

The design of the retaining walls has advanced significantly since the Commission's preliminary approval in January 2003. NPS has selected a gray granite with several types of finish. The walls have a rusticated appearance, similar to the lodge. In combination with the contemporary style of the occasional bollards, the granite finishes will contribute to the informal park-like character of the site, remind visitors of the nineteenth-century origins of the monument, and blend sufficiently into the knoll so that they become a feature of the grounds without dominating the view of the knoll and monument.

Further, staff finds that the 30-inch-high retaining wall that encircles the rear of the proposed addition to the lodge is of an appropriate and consistent treatment and height, given the landscape design and retaining walls as developed and currently submitted.

Future views into the grounds will be of a low and dark wall ringing the base of the knoll and curving paths following the slope of the knoll. It will become a designed landscape feature of the site.

Monument Plaza

It is staff's recommendation that the plaza be paved entirely with granite, rather than with the combination of granite and exposed aggregate concrete proposed as an alternative. The use of granite on the monument plaza is an improvement over the concrete and asphalt now in place. The paving design is simple and appropriate to the character, material, and color of the monument itself. The eight proposed benches, of white Georgia granite, are handsome in design and properly scaled. Without backs, they are low to the ground and will allow visitors to use them facing in either direction, appropriately.

Planting Plan

There is no surviving planting scheme on the grounds that embodies a particular historic era or formal landscape plan. It is the pastoral character of the grounds that has endured over time, altered by changing uses, planning efforts, and landscape and planting styles. The underlying principle of open turf surrounded by groves of trees at the perimeter has been preserved in the proposed tree plan.

Staff finds the planting plan historically appropriate. It incorporates some aspects of previous landscape plans for the site, both realized and unrealized. It retains the romanticism of the original Downing-esque curved paths, the linearity of the McMillan Plan in the retention of the paths leading to 17th Street, and the cardinal axial views and simple circulation envisioned in the

McMillan, Olmsted, Jr., and Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill plans. It also preserves the use of the site for recreation and reflection that has characterized the use of the grounds since 1889.

The grounds used to be surrounded by street trees that died of Dutch elm disease. Disease-resistant American Elms will be replanted on both sides of Madison and Jefferson Drives, appropriately leading toward the lodge and the entrances to the grounds. The 1990s realignment of Madison and Jefferson Drives between 14th and 15th Streets that focused both drives inward toward the lodge is complemented by the proposed plantings of flowering trees around the lodge, underscoring the restoration of the lodge as a significant feature on the grounds. Street trees on 14th Street in the east-west vista would be appropriately removed.

Lighting

The lighting scheme will greatly improve the appearance of the grounds both during the day and at night, and will likely encourage increased visitation to the grounds at night. The quality and character of the lighting will be improved, the placement of the lighting will enhance the views of the monument, and some of the bulky light fixtures will be removed from the plaza. The small wall-niche lights in the retaining walls will allow the grounds to be used more easily after nightfall.

Signs

NPS's use of the Downtown BID signs on the Mall was anticipated by the Commission in its 1999 approval of the directional signage system. The signs are appropriately placed at decision-making points for visitors. Visitors to the city will recognize the signs if they have visited the downtown and will know to refer to them for information. The eleven orientation signs around the perimeter are appropriately scaled, low to the ground, and are a sufficient but minimal number for a site of this size. The incised granite signs are well designed and will be minimally intrusive.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on May 14, 2003, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; Fire Department; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the District of Columbia Department of Transportation; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

The project as currently proposed has not been submitted to CFA. NPS last submitted a proposal to CFA in September 2002.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposal is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan of the Nation's Capital. As the Washington Monument Grounds are part of the Mall Complex, an applicable policy in the Parks Open Space and Natural Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan specifies:

The great cross-axes of the Mall Complex, from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial and from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial, are a unique national space—they are a summary of democratic ideals and achievement that must be protected from inappropriate development. The Mall should be considered complete, and any improvements necessary in this area should be limited in scope and sensitively designed to reinforce the integrity of the Mall Complex.

The following policies for the protection and enhancement of historic properties in the Preservation and Historic Features Element are applicable to the proposed alterations to the monument grounds, which preserve the integrity of the National Register qualities of the monument grounds while accommodating new site requirements and a new circulation plan:

The distinguishing qualities or character of Historic Landscapes should be protected and enhanced.

Publicly owned Historic Landscapes and historic open spaces, such as monument grounds, public buildings, gardens, forts, battlefields, cemeteries, reservations, parks, and park systems, should be protected from unrelated and unnecessary construction that would adversely affect their integrity.

National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the NPS prepared an Environmental Assessment for the proposed action of improving permanent security for the Washington Monument, which includes the Washington Monument Lodge. NPS completed a NEPA decision process culminating in a Finding of No Significant Impact on July 22, 2002.

NCPC staff analyzed, in conformance with the requirements of NEPA, the prepared Environmental Assessment (EA) completed by NPS. Staff recommended adoption of the EA and prepared a Finding of No Significant Impact in December 2002 based on the EA in accordance with the provisions of the NEPA regulations issued by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR, 1500-1508).

National Historic Preservation Act

NPS has determined, and the DC SHPO has concurred, that the proposed landscape plan is compatible with the characteristics that qualify the Washington Monument grounds and other

potentially affected properties for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and that the plan meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and for Alterations to Cultural Landscapes. NPS's analysis, including its application of the Standards, is attached to this report, with the DC SHPO's response. NPS submitted a draft Cultural Landscape Report for review by all parties, as stipulated in the Programmatic Agreement (PA).

Pursuant to Stipulation #3 of the PA, a consultation meeting with the parties was held on May 14, 2003 to discuss the landscape plan and other matters, including the established historical Period of Significance for the monument grounds, which NPS has determined to be 1848 to 1943. These dates encompass the period from the initial construction of the monument to the dedication of the Jefferson Memorial, by which time Independence Avenue had been extended through the site.

Consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the terms of the PA will continue for the duration of the project. The PA describes the procedures for the historic preservation consultation, the requirements for the type of information to be disseminated, and the basis for the consultation, which is to take into account the National Register of Historic Places affected historic properties and apply the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation for conformance regarding all alterations proposed for the site, including the monument and its grounds, and adjacent historic properties.

The signatory agencies and the consulting parties have reviewed iterations of the proposal over the past year by commenting and suggesting possible alternatives to mitigate or avoid possible effects. These comments have been made during the consultation meetings established by the PA, and also in additional meetings, including some on site. Many of the consulting parties commented in writing on the Environmental Assessment.